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QUAD

A little magazine of literature and art published sporadically by Birmingham-Southern College as a means of presenting the best creative efforts of the student community.

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In addition to the above, I would especially like to thank all the members of the English Department of Birmingham-Southern College, who have helped me greatly with my work.

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All contributions of material — short stories, poetry, critical writings, photographs, art work, etc. — would be greatly appreciated. Deadline for the April issue is March 20, 1969. Any person interested in contributing or working on the staff please contact the editor.

—Wade Black

LAIS DE MARIE DE FRANCE

Marie de France was the first major French poetess. She lived in the royal court of 12th century England, but there is reason to believe that she was French by birth. "Maria ai nom, si sui de France," is her only biographical notice. She may well have come from Britanny, for her lais show a great familiarity with Celtic legends and traditions. This fragment is from the "Lai de Guigemar," a lengthy tale in the chivalric tradition of magic, romance, and adventure.

Here watch the baron, prince-aged, heading toward
His home – the rich lands of his father and his lord,
Going to see again his mother,
Good woman, now a duchess, and the other
Of his fondness – loving sister – all have well
Desired his visit.

I hear tell

He stayed a month. But one day, sharpening a blunt
And ancient falchion, his desire to hunt
Again revived. That night he called his men
Together – nobles, hunters, servants, all, and then
Into the forest past the castle lawn
They went in search of game. They found, at dawn,
The prints of a great stag – they loose the hounds.
The huntsmen run. The brachet bells and bounds
Ahead. The baron stays behind
And waits. He turns to find
His servant with his quiver, knife, and bow.
For luck, he wants to shoot from where he stands and so
He watches quietly. Between the trees
And mottled shrubs he finally sees
Across the woven forest lawn
A strange white doe beside her fawn.

Deformed and beautiful – all nature mourns.

Stag's horns!

Perhaps the brachet roused her. Without thought,

The baron bent his straining bow and shot.

The arrow struck her foreleg and she fell.

Hell,

Or worse, countered and the arrow's course

Rebounded, and it pinned the baron's thigh into his horse.

He fell. His leg was torn.

His head crashed near the white doe's sinking horn.

He woke.

The doe, in pain, raised her great head and spoke.

"Ai, Lasse. Leave me. Flee.

You, you peasant who have killed me,

This shall be your destiny:

Medicine you shall not find

Or root or herb or any kind

Of potion which can ever cure

The bleeding wound that's stuck in your

Forever useless thigh.

I

Curse you – until you find

One who will suffer for your blind

Consuming love, so great a pain

As women never have, nor will again.

And if such girl exist, it will amaze

All who love, or have, or will in later days.

Until you find such one, your hurt will never cease.

Away from here! Leave me in peace!"

— translated from the Old French

by Dale Hill and Reid Byers

A Scene from THE SIXTH STORY

—A Gothic Play by Howard Cruse
Produced for the Playwright's Lab
Spring, 1968

© 1967 by Howard Cruse

The house has six stories, one for each of the occupants. It was to have been the grand rehearsal hall for the ultimate extension of popular entertainment: on stage existentialism for the screaming teens of the world. But Manchester Wintergrey of the First Story is dead. His fiancee of the Sixth Story, Malaria Coining, has left her tower, has exiled herself to the Sea Cliffs, has offered the spirit of Manchester a house cleansed of materiality, has offered the hungry mouth of the Sea all the materiality which she fears. But Penny, the humble maid, has come out from under the stairs to offer herself as Manchester's replacement. She holds in her hand the dog whistle which has been the key to the Act of the Century, the key to the souls of the Four. About a house still ringing with the scream of death, the wind calls now for the tape of a supple mind and a stillborn soul.

PENNY: (Alone, rehearsing her role.)

You may call me superficial, but it's better
That I concern myself with these things
That you . . . (Pause.)
You may call me superficial, but it's better
That I concern myself with these things
Than you . . . (Pause.)
You may say . . . (Pause.)
You may say that I am dealing
With superficialities,
But these things must be dealt with,
And it's better . . . (Pause. She wilts.)
God! I'm not used to it.
That's the only reason. I'm scared.
It will be different soon . . .
(*The Four enter silently.*)

FLAME: You called?

PENNY: (Absentely.) No,
I was just planning to—
(*She looks at the whistle, realizing that they have already come.*)
I haven't called you yet.
Why are you here already?

ROCK: We knew you were going to call us.

PENNY: You're too fast for me, boys!

You were never that fast
For Mr. Wintergrey.
Not when he needed you!

WALTER: Manchester . . .

TERRY: . . . Was a different story.

PENNY: Well, let's get down to business.
I hope you don't think I'm presumptuous,
Resuming rehearsals so soon
After Mr. Wintergrey's death.
But arrangements for new public appearances
And TV guest spots have been made,
And getting down to work
Will help get our minds off of . . .
Our loss. (*The Four are ominously silent, staring.*) Now I feel that, basically,
All that's necessary with the act per se
Is a little tidying up.
Touches here and there.
You had gotten where you were going;
It's refinements we need . . .
(*She is losing confidence.*)
Of course, I'm sure
That I couldn't add that much



To Mr. Wintergrey's instruction
Anyway . . .
But as I was saying,
The thing that needs the most work,
As I see it, is . . .
Your entrance!
Now as an artistic director,
Mr. Wintergrey was without peer, but
He wasn't that much of a dramatic **showman!**
Do you see what I mean?
(*The Four are like statues.*)
Now you may say . . .
That I am dealing with superficialities
But . . . these things must be
Dealt with—
(*The Four take a sudden breath in unison.*
Penny halts. The Four begin talking in vacant rhythms.)

THE FOUR: No! !

FLAME: Not superficialities . . .

ROCK: Not superficialities at all . . .

WALTER: Not at all, it isn't that at all.

TERRY: It's these things that have to be
Tended to . . .

FLAME: These things that make the
First impression . . .

ROCK: That make us look like professionals.

WALTER: The quality of everything . . .

TERRY: . . . Of everything about the act . . .

FLAME & ROCK: Everything . . .

WALTER: The quality of . . .

WALTER, FLAME & ROCK: . . . Everything . . .

WALTER & TERRY: . . . Needs to be . . .

TERRY: Consistent!

WALTER: Excellent!

THE FOUR: Impressive!

FLAME: It's better
That you think about these things . . .

ROCK & WALTER: Much better
That you think about these things . . .

TERRY: Than us.

WALTER: After . . .

THE FOUR: All . . .

FLAME: We need to think about the art.

ROCK: It's much better that you think . . .

WALTER: It's much better that you do it.

TERRY: It's not being superficial.
It's only being careful!

(*This barrage is followed by deadly silence.*
Penny proceeds uncertainly.)

PENNY: All right then.

Now I had an idea—
Actually, it's not purely my idea:
It's sort of like something we did
In grammar school one time.
Adapted, of course.
It's kind of showy, but
It catches people off their guard,
Gets them in the mood for an interesting show.
We'll call this the edge of the proscenium.
There'll be music naturally.
One two three four one two three four.

(Accompanied by a mocking rehearsal piano,
Penny choreographs an arty and painfully
amateurish entrance, which involves each of
the Four entering, taking a pose, and with
each new entrance shifting into a new
tableau. As they finish, Flame startles
Penny by taking her hand.)

FLAME: How was that?

PENNY: (Nervously.) That . . .
Was fine . . . for a start!

ROCK: And then?

FLAME: What comes next?

WALTER: What comes after the entrance?

PENNY: After the entrance . . .

The act!

FLAME: The act!

Shall we perform the act?

PENNY: Oh, I've seen the act.

No need to do it for me!

TERRY: But this is a rehearsal!

WALTER: We need the full practice . . .

FLAME: The whole thing—

WALTER & TERRY: Start . . .

TERRY: . . . To finish.

FLAME: The full scope of everything

That was between Manchester and us.

Infinity brought to this moment.

Timelessness conveyed from human to human

In the only way that it has ever been conveyed

—Through love.

PENNY: Through love?

FLAME: Love is the all!

It has always been.

PENNY: (*In panic.*) Let's call Malaria—

MALARIA!!

—To see the opening we've worked out—

(*Music crashes in as Penny tries to move away. With precise variations on Penny's choreography, the Four move to block her path.*) What's going on?

TERRY: (*Coldly.*) You moved into the game.

PENNY: What game?

TERRY: You should have checked!

(*Flame snaps his finger; Terry becomes silent.*)

PENNY: I've been at your rehearsals.
All you ever talked about
Was art. Not love.

THE FOUR: (*Whispering*) Deaf . . .

FLAME: The night Manchester died,
You heard a sound.
That was the beginning.
One event is never alone.
To hear the whistle is not to know the love;
To hear the whistle is to know
That you cannot escape the love.

PENNY: Love . . . ? Love . . . ?
Get away from me!
I don't know what you mean !

FLAME: You will.

PENNY: Get away!
You can have the whistle back!

FLAME: You have heard the tone.
You must know the all.

PENNY: It's just a whistle!

FLAME: Forget the whistle! It's past;
It only opened the door.

PENNY: What door?

FLAME: Look at us, Penny!

(*She backs away, staring at the Four. The sound of the Sea builds in the background. Penny screams.*)

PENNY: **I DON'T WANT IT!**
TAKE IT AWAY FROM ME!

(*The crash of waves builds to a roar. Lights cross-fade to illuminate Malaria on the Sea Cliff. At the foot of the cliff-platform is a chaotic pile of chairs.*)

MALARIA: Into the Sea!
It's all in the Sea!

All the clutter!
(*The Sea sounds become quieter.*)
All the clutter into the Sea.
The house must be clean!
But the light . . .
The light's still on in the Sixth Story.
He's still there.
Where Manchester died.
Well, Malaria,
You forgot some of the clutter.
There's still some up here,
Some clutter up here,
That would be better off in the Sea.
Why don't you throw it in? (*Pause.*)
Make the air cleaner? It's like
Dusting a pool of swamp water.
You can't dust away your own reflection.
You can only clean the surface.
There's always that other dimension: time.
You can't reach that,
Throw that into the Sea!
Can't throw Chicago!
I could if I could get my hands on it:
It's not that it's too big!
I'm not strong, but if I could raise my head
And grab one breath of oxygen,
I could throw the whole world into hell!
But there's a new Chicago there now,
Where the other one used to be,
And I don't care about it.
I want the old one with me in it.
That's the one I'd like to drown.
But I can't get my hands on it.
(*In the background a green light dimly reveals Manchester, immobile, now swathed to the waist in a mummy's wrappings.*)
Do I seem
To have given up on you, Manchester?
I haven't.
I give you your home, clean,
With all the clutter thrown into the Sea.
Almost all the clutter.
Wherever it is, never to return.

(*The music becomes a monotonous, pulsing, ritualistic sound. Lights rise on the Four and Penny. The Four are standing; Penny kneels on the floor, the whistle before her. All is calm: this is a frozen moment in time.*)

PENNY: Do I get a choice?
(*She looks up at them timidly.*)

Hmm?

ROCK: Yes.

PENNY: (*Brightening.*) Yes?

ROCK: Afterwards.

PENNY: Oh.

ROCK: A choice of whether
You would have wanted it to happen
If you had had a choice.

PENNY: Oh.
Can I go ahead and choose now?
Choose early? Just for fun?

ROCK: As long as you understand the game.

PENNY: I don't

ROCK: You will.

PENNY: I get that feeling.

ROCK: Since so little hinges on your choice,
You may exercise it if you wish.

PENNY: All right. My choice
Is whether or not to wish it,
What does one gain by wishing?
I wanted to hear the sound . . .
And I did hear it.
Mr. Wintergrey didn't wish to hear it,
But he did.
The difference is
That he is dead and I'm to live.

FLAME: He is dead to know love,
And you are to live to know love.

PENNY: There's that aspect of it . . .

FLAME: But for him,
Love will mean new life;
For you, it will mean death.

PENNY: I'm to be killed?

FLAME: The knowledge will be killed,
As soon as it is conceived.

ROCK: A painless abortion of the mind.

PENNY: But why?

ROCK: Why?

FLAME: The word has no meaning.

That's a different game.

PENNY: (*Reaching slowly for the whistle.*)

This is my choice, then.

My choice is whatever this whistle sings
With nobody but time blowing it.

(*The music grows loud. Sea sounds enter as Penny raises the whistle in the air. Lights cross-fade to Malaria on the Cliff, who takes the whistle from the air in front of her.*)

MALARIA: This is it.

The whole thing.

Your gift to me, Manchester?

(*The music and Sea sounds fade.*)

That's right.

Be quiet.

Let me think. (*She looks at the whistle.*)

Should I blow it,

Or should I throw it into the Sea?

It was given to me,

But it's not really mine.

Why does the world play jokes like that?

Red herrings and carrots on strings—

It's a cruel game,

With no feeling for the pain we suffer.

I walk across this stage, climb the steps

To this cliff overlooking the ocean;

I push away the props,

Throw them down behind me,

Trying to reach some point

Of austerity in this charade.

And then this follows me,

Is given to me. (*Pause.*)

I don't have to blow it.

If I only touch my lips to it,

The cycle will be completed.

With the Princess's kiss,

The Sleeping Prince awakens.

But there's no wedding to follow.

Cupid was out crapping in the bushes,

And fate swiped his bow and arrow!

I know I've lost him.

This is the sound that killed him;

If I kiss it

—In case some warmth from his lips
Is still in it—I'm cursing him.

This is the game the world plays,
Giving it to me when it knew I was finished
Already.

All right.

My last move's been handed me.

(*Music re-enters, slowly mounting. She raises the whistle to her lips. As she touches it, we hear the Sea roar and see the totally swathed corpse of Manchester twisting slowly. Then the lights on Manchester fade.*)

No, no, no . . .

My next-to-last move;

This is my last move!

I won't just curse you with a kiss, Manchester!
I'll curse you with all the air in my lungs!

A world that hates gave you to me,
Gave me the sound to hate you back with!

If this is the Plan, I'll make it my Plan!

Let it rattle your skull; or worse yet,

Let it give you Life!

Damn it, it's no skin off my back—

I can't even hear it!

Let those of you who can bear the agony,
And, if you're fools enough, rejoice!

(*She blows the whistle with all her might. A shrieking sound tops loud music and the Sea; the lights glow on the corpse, writhing as though in terrible pain. The sounds reach a peak, then fade, and lights illuminate Penny and the Four. Penny is lying still, her dress torn. She seems to be in shock. Rock, Terry, and Walter stand with their backs to her and to the audience. Flame faces her; he holds his shirt in one hand.*

(*Penny seems to be trembling with cold. Flame walks to her and starts to lay the shirt across her. Her eyes open; she begins to scream.*)

PENNY: NO!

TAKE IT AWAY!

I don't WANT IT!

(*Flame pauses, then turns, and all Four exit.*)

THE LOVELACE AFFAIR

This story was initially prepared by Al Pearson and David Robertson as a joint project for Mr. McWilliams' class in Advanced Composition this past summer.

August 2, 19--

Mrs. Charles Algernon Lovelace, Sr.
Lovelace Landing, Louisiana

My Dearest Mrs. Lovelace,

Words cannot express, nor can time recompense, the sorrow in which I now take pen in hand in order that I might shed some little tear with you in commiserating the dolorous, late circumstances regarding your son, Charles Algernon, Junior. Though I have never had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, I have, through my association with Charles Algernon, become cognizant of that certain sweet sensibility, that, nurtured in your bosom, found fairest seedtime and blossomed forth into the figure of your off-spring, of whom it may be said, as with the one of "Adonais,"

grew

Like a pale flower by some maiden cherished,
And fed with truelove tears, instead of dew.

That the tender stalk of such a fine cultivation should be, as it were, cut down in the prime by the foul hand of an assassin who shall here go unnamed staggers the imagination. Further, that certain noisome elements of your son's deflowering, so to speak, should be picked up and bruited about by the yellow press of this city is enough to quicken the pulse and prick the sensibilities of one to whom Womanhood is not an empty term, chivalry a dead impulse: ill indeed betides the time in which a family that puts aside the black robes of grieving Proserpine succeeds only in exposing itself to the naked ignominy of public scandal.

It is in response to this bestial violation of the rules of good breeding, as well as in regard of the delicate nature of the circumstances, that I have taken the liberty, Mrs. Lovelace, of assembling for your private perusal and consolation the records and personal correspondence of all the principals to this unfortunate affair. You will find these papers overleaf; I have, for want of a better term to describe the unnatural situation contained herein, entitled them, simply, 'The Lovelace Affair'



From, COURT RECORD, STATE OF LOUISIANA v. PETER D. ZAPPO, IN THE CHARGE OF MURDER IN THE FIRST DEGREE. Court was convened into session at nine o'clock in the morning, the Honorable Judge Tobias C. Venable presiding. All in the courtroom having risen upon His Honor's taking the bench, Judge Venable called the court to order. Counsel for the prosecution then proceeded with the examination of the first witness.

PROSECUTION: Well, sir, to return to the point we had just reached yesterday before adjournment, you had just stated your name to the court as Mr. William Fitzpatrick Willowhue. Now, then, Mr. Willowhue, would you please tell this court your occupation?

WILLOWHUE: It would be a delight. I am, sir, a follower of the Muse and a practitioner of belle-lettres.

PROSECUTION: I, uh, beg your pardon?

WILLOWHUE: That is to say, a piper of the oaten reeds and a player of the Orphean lyre.

PROSECUTION: Oh, you're a jazz musician?

WILLOWHUE: No, no. I am, in other words, a guardian of the Apollonian laurels.

JUDGE VENABLE: Clerk is instructed to enter Mr. Willowhue's occupation as a student of English at Tulane University. That is, if I interpret the young man correctly.

PROSECUTION: Well, to get back to what we were saying, Mr. Willowhue, am I correct in stating that it was in a student's apartment at Tulane where you encountered Mr. Charles Algernon Lovelace, Junior, on the night of Friday May the twenty-second?

DEFENSE: Objection! Your Honor, counsel for the defense has introduced in the past, and is prepared to introduce at the present, ample evidence, including an affidavit affixed and asworn to by the entire membership of Company "C," First Battalion, R.O.T.C. Division, Tulane University, pertaining to the moral turpitude of one Miss Lydia H. "Bubbles" Lavern.

JUDGE VENABLE: As at many times in the past, counsel for the defense is instructed that this court is neither interested in, nor deciding upon, the occupation, or, rather, the preoccupation, of Miss Lydia H. "Bubbles" Lavern. Objection overruled. Counsel may proceed with

examining the witness.

PROSECUTION: Now, uh, as I was saying before we were interrupted, Mr. Willowhue, you and Miss Lavern were at an apartment when Mr. Lovelace arrived?

WILLOWHUE: Yes. [After staring coldly at the counsel for defense for several moments] We were, as I recall, sharing an aperitif.

PROSECUTION: And, when Mr. Lovelace arrived, did you notice anything unusual about his behavior?

WILLOWHUE: No, not that I recall.

PROSECUTION: Not anything?

WILLOWHUE: Well, he was brandishing a pistol.

PROSECUTION: Aha! [Seizing a large, flintlock handgun labeled "Exhibit A" and pointing it toward the chest of Mr. Peter Zappo] And was it with this same one-handed engine, Mr. Willowhue, that, firing once and firing no more, the cruel finger of an assassin lodged that fatal missle into the breast of youth and brought Charles Algernon Lovelace, Junior, to an untimely grave?

WILLOWHUE: Indeed, it was.

April 30, 19—

Dear Lydia,

Cheers, babycakes! How are all the magnolia blossoms down in Bogalusa? I'll bet it's pure deadsville down your way. How can you stand it, babycakes? You just gotta, gotta, gotta come to the big city sometimes soon. Bourbon Street is so marvy you wouldn't believe it. There is just no end to the sugar daddies which means plenty of free booze for yours truly.

To hell with Tulane and Sophie Newcombe! I told my parents to buzz off, because I'm about through booking it. The action around here is just too fast to make the big effort for auld lang syne. Dropping out of school was the smartest thing you ever did, babycakes. But you'll just go nutsy, if you don't leave hicksville and come to New Orleans soon.

Oh, Lydia, I almost forgot to tell you about this funny little story. I was down at Frogman Henry's the other night trying to latch on to a sugar daddy for a free ride, and I ran into this

fool. He came up to the bar and sat down right besides yours truly. Well, this clown thinks he is the phantom or something, because he is wearing this black cape along with dark clothes and black riding boots. He looked very suspicious. At first I thought he was some kind of pervert, but it turned out that he was just another fruitcake—one of the million or so down here in New Orleans. Anyway I decided to have a little fun with him. I made sure he caught sight of my legs. But he was real sly and only looked out of the corners of his eyes, so as not be conspicuous.

After a while, the phantom spoke to me in a fierce voice: "Strumpet, do not tempt me with your vileness."

I acted like I didn't hear him, and all of a sudden he grabbed my hand and asked that I forgive him for calling me a strumpet. (So what's a strumpet, I thought.) I told him to forget it and buy me a drink. Well, with my luck, you know he would insist on a bottle of wine. The beverage of true love is what he called it. All I know is that it makes you sick. And also he wanted some bread and cheese with it. But I told him: "No thanks. The wine was plenty."

Then he told me that I reminded him of a poem. He stood up on the barstool and recited it to everybody in Frogman's. I looked up the lines:

"She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes, and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes."

I could have died when he did that.

I was fed up with his act, so I told him to get on his cape and fly back to wherever he came from. Then he got real mad again and stood up. His glass of wine had been sitting on his tie as it lay across the bartop, and when he stood up, it spilled all over his clothes. Everybody in Frogman's was in tears, because he was so funny. All of a sudden he called me a strumpet (which means whore) again, and he broke his bottle of wine on the wall.

I've spent many a night on the Quarter, but this one was the living end. This fruitcake was from the outer limits.

Lydia, baby, come on up sometimes soon, and I'll get you a date with my mystery man. Maybe you can take him by the horns.

Cheers,

Clarissa Cloverfield

Excerpt, from the unpublished journal of Charles Algernon Lovelace, Junior, "Il Penserooso in L' Allegro World":

Today I met my love. Strange indeed, we learn, are the workings of faery Romance, and I marvel, as I sit now at my desk writing while the sun dies in the west over my shoulder, that the day which brought the ethereal creature who is to work such a sweet change into my life should have begun on such an inauspicious note. Today began as any other, as I awoke and began to prepare for the morning's classes. Because of last night's debaucheries, I had slept past the alarm, and my fellow roommate, George Willowhue, had left for classes. The face of the clock showed twenty-five till eight as I hurriedly pulled on my trousers, which, for some reason that I am unable to recall, were very damp and smelled strongly of wine. Due to my haste, I had no time for breakfast; however, consoling myself with the thought that my Lord Byron often dined solely on biscuits and vinegar, I threw my coat over my shoulders and started out for classes.

The instructor had begun to call the class roll when I reached my first class at the auditorium, and he left off naming the class roster to stare at me walk up the aisle. As fate would have it, I had chosen this morning to wear my English riding boots—*clop, clop, clop* echoed off the walls as I made my way to my seat on the thirty-ninth row. My neck smarting at the sound of titterings from my row, I slumped down in my seat as the instructor resumed calling the roster. 'Calhoun, Chesterman, Cloverfield . . .' I bolted upright in my seat, my ears pricked forward. *Cloverfield*—there was something familiar about that name . . . Oh, sweet Clio, muse of memory, it comes to me now! She is the same sprite-like creature of the night before at Frogman Henry's! Miss Clarissa

Cloverfield! Already my memory of her had faded into the mists of a waking dream, yet, there she sits, two rows in front of me, coquettishly dabbing a wet fingertip to a torn stocking. Such an arrangement could not be mere hapstance; it was her fate to present herself, mine to seize the day, so to speak. Poor John Keats, I fear I paid you scant heed that lecture-day! My hand scarce touched pencil to paper the entire hour as I directed my every gaze toward my Clarissa—not wishing to appear unseemly forward, however, I confined my eye-beams to covert, discrete glances. The moment class was over, I made my way down the aisle toward Clarissa, who had reached the door in a circle of young admirers. I recognized several of them as varsity members of the football squad as I vainly tried to shoulder my way through the crowd. Fortunately for me, just at that moment Clarissa dropped her pencil. I quickly retrieved it.

'I beg your pardon, I believe you dropped this.'

Our eye-beams met, twisted together, and strained in marriage.

'Oh, really? Thanks."

She loves me, I know it.

May 16, 19--

Dear Lydia,

Do you remember that letter I wrote you a week or so back about the character in Frogman Henry's? He has turned up again, black cape, dark clothes, white gloves, riding boots, and the whole works. Only this time, he came to my apartment, the new one I just got near the French Quarter. God knows how he found me. But he just appeared at my door one evening, and he told me: "Dearest Clarissa, I must have discourse with you about a matter of great intimacy concerning the two of us." It beats me how he even knew my name.

I didn't know whether this was a proposition or not. If it was, it was the strangest proposition I have ever come across. You would have to meet him to realize how weird this fruitcake was. But I took a chance with the phantom and let him in. He bowed low and kissed my hand

when he walked by me. I almost cracked up laughing over this moron, because he was so serious.

He began to tell me how that he had seen me over at school in one of his literature classes. He thought it was a good sign we had such an important interest in common — the study of literature. Literature, my ass! He looked very hurt when I told him that I despised poetry.

Oh, babycakes, I almost forgot something. When I let the phantom in, he threw off his cape and handed me a dozen red roses, symbolic of the saturnine star-child that I was. That's how he said it, babycakes, just like some famous writer. He's just super with the words.

Anyway, he apologized again for calling me a strumpet and said that every once in a while he had these fits of rage, because of his extreme sensitivity. Then he said that I was his literary muse, and he wanted me to explore Romantic literature with him.

This idiocy continued for a good three hours until I distracted his attention to yours truly. That was a mistake, too. This guy has got the style of a gorilla when it comes to women. Besides that, he has no gratitude; all of a sudden he just stood up and put on his cape, etc. and stormed to the door. He told me: "Clarissa, your heart is entombed in an iceberg." And I said that I loved him too. Then he quoted me some more poetry:

"The heart's echoes render no song
When the spirit is mute."

Cheese, what gratitude! He just slammed the door when he left.

The next night he called me to apologize for his behavior, but I hung up. Then the mystery man sent me a note saying that if I rejected him, he would take his life. This has been bugging me for days. Lydia, babycakes, old friend, you just have to come see me next Friday and help me get out of this jam. The phantom is driving me nuts.

The star child,

Clarissa Cloverfield

P.S. Got a new mini-skirt yesterday that glows in the dark. It will look great when I dance down at the Frogman's.

Excerpt, from the unpublished journal of Charles Algernon Lovelace, Junior, "Il Penseroso in L' Allegro World":

Tonight I made her mine. Since that first morning fate had thrust us together, so to speak, Clarissa has been the center of my thoughts. Finally, earlier tonight, I brought my courage to the sticking point and set out for Clarissa's apartment (the location of which, oddly enough, was supplied me with no difficulty by one of the school atheletes on my first asking). Along the way, in a cavalier mood, I bought a bouquet of roses to give my Clarissa when I presented myself, ostensibly to help her studies—though, I confess, Eros more than Agape was closer to my thoughts as I neared Clarissa's apartment.

Clarissa appeared a trifle surprised when she opened the door, although I confess that I, too, could barely conceive that, at long last, our dream was being realized. Shutting the door firmly behind me, I presented her with my floral favors and then set about the task of making this sweet, unlettered child into a respectable muse. For two hours, we transversed the entire Romantic period together, and, afterwards, I unlocked for my Clarissa the sweet intricities of the Spanish tongue. *Yo amo, tu amaste, nosotros amaríamos.* Oh, why must our love always be past tense, future conditional? Or is it, I wonder, present imperfect?

Just as I was explaining higher conjugation, Clarissa shut her book and stared directly into my eyes. Lighting a cigarette to hide my nervousness, I reached out and gently touched her hand. Immediately, Clarissa sprang forward and we fell back on the couch, where for a few sweet moments we rolled emmeshed in Venus's chain. Oh, how can I describe the ecstasies of those few moments? My heart beat madly as though it were the pump for love's pure flame. Flame burst at my temples, flame burst at my eyelids, at my chest, at my codpiece, at my ankles . . . Great God, at my codpiece? To my horror, I looked down and saw a pillar of flame rising from my lap, where I had dropped my cigarette. Clarissa, sitting up and rearranging her hair, said, 'Algemon, baby, I hate to tell you, but I think you're on fire.' By this time,

the smoke was watering my eyes, but I tried to explain to her how symbolic it was that we should perish together in the flames of our passion. Clarissa was irritated. 'Al-l-ger-non,' she exclaimed, brushing the ashes off my lap.

'My dear, you may call me Al.'

Clarissa looked up, and, for a moment, my mournful eyes stared soulfully out at her.

'Can you touch my sorrow?' I whispered.

A gleam lit Clarissa's eye. One hand snaked out toward the light switch, the other toward my offended lap.

'No, no, not *that!*'

'But, Algemon, baby, I thought you said—'

'Oh, never mind,' I sighed.

[Written on another sheet of the journal in a shaky, uncertain hand]

I have been . . . debauched.

May 18, 19--

Clarissa,

Long time no see. I heard over the grapevine that you are *making out* very well these days down in the Quarter. (*pun optional*)

I really hate to write you this little letter, but necessity is necessity. In case you haven't heard, I got the boot from school last spring; the campus police caught me on the third floor of the girl's dorm during a panty raid. I have been down and out ever since. In fact, I have been forced to get a job — on the graveyard shift, no less — at Glutstein's Meatpackers Inc. Believe me that place has personality. The Glutstein motto is "Cut the overhead; cut the quality; but never cut the prices." Clarissa, baby, beware of Glutstein meats. If they aren't rotten when we get them, they rot on the way to the store.

Knowing your sympathetic heart, you are probably in tears over my misfortune by now, but forget the emotion. At the bottom of the barrel there are suckers just the same as at the top of the barrel. And Pete Zappo you will recall finds the suckers anywhere. The most recent catch is a fellow bologna stuffer at Glutstein's, one sweet, generous woman by the

May 24, 19--

name of Bertha Crabbs. She's ugly, but she is oh so sweet. What Pete Zappo doesn't have Bertha Crabbs gives him. She's the pillar of our relationship, so to speak.

But enough of this maudlin history and to the point. You still have my collection of Jack Conroy's works. An S.D.S. member would rather be caught with his pants down than without his Jack Conroy in close reach. Therefore, if I may. I propose to you a Friday evening rendezvous to allow me to pick up this valuable property. I'll be by about eight-thirty.

Your ex-spouse,

Pete Zappo

May 17, 19--

To the Venus of my life,
Miss Clarissa Cloverfield:

Clarissa, dearest heart, avatar of sweetness, goodness, and unbounded charity, I implore your forgiveness for my wretched treatment of you. It was grossly improper. I shall, therefore, make amends for my grievous behavior forthwith, darling, so be not heart torn.

Your coruscating eyes, so brutally saddened, have pierced into my heart of darkness. Oh, sad one, forgive me, forgive me, the wretch that I am. Only your love, your heart, can free me from the web of fate that dooms ordinary men. Together we can explore the ethereal as love birds disdainful of the baseness of common human love for a greater love. It can be ours, dear Clarissa.

Yes, dear heart, the time is well nigh, and on Friday evening next, we shall again partake of our deep mutuality. I shall be for you at nine o'clock.

With deep affection,

Charles Algernon Lovelace

Dear Lydia,

Babycakes, I owe you an apology for last Friday night's horror show. It was a trap. I tried to tell you about the phantom and his sensitivities, but there is no substitute for seeing him in the flesh.

Maybe you wondered why mystery man Lovelace got so mad when he found Mr. Pete on the premises? It seems that since Pete and I once co-habitated that we had become husband and wife by common law. This fact made Charles an adulterer since he and I also enjoyed a relationship of intimate reciprocity, as he put it. For this Zappo should have challenged Charles to duel to make amends for the offense done his honor. But Mr. Pete, who has no honor, did not have this in mind, so his refusal to call Charles out to duel became an offense to the honor of Charles. Sort of like insult to injury. So babycakes, the phantom had to challenge Mr. Pete to duel to the death. And that's why he slapped Pete across the face with his white gloves. Charles is such a creep.

Pete thought the whole thing was pretty funny until he got slapped. After that he decided that the idea of a duel at the Oaks was not bad at all.

Really, babycakes, Pete could end a lot of my troubles if he mashed up this phantom. Algernon and his poetry and his bad moods are too much. The novelty has worn out if you know what I mean, babycakes. Write soon.

Fingers crossed,

Clarissa

Excerpt, from the unpublished journal of Charles Algernon Lovelace, Junior, "Il Penseroso in L' Allegro World":

Ill shines the star of this day. Now, I consider myself a bookish man, not much given to the baser passions, but when I consider the thousand indignities to which my person has been subjected, violence, pure and simple, appears my only recourse. Imagine my shock, upon arriving for my tryst with sweet Clarissa,

to discover another man within her chambers, assuming the greatest familiarity with, and intimate knowledge of, my own true Clarissa. Imagine my shock, compounded a hundredfold into horror, upon learning that this same Peter D. Zappo, as he styled himself, had taken my Clarissa as his most casual of paramours! The sin of Lancelot and Guenevere was mine! I expected, of course, to be called out immediately by this nefarious Zappo, ill-bred lout though he may be. Imagine, then, my further mortification upon this Zappo's treating the inadvertent compromise of Clarissa's honor as a subject for amusement, refusing to tender me a challenge, in clear contradiction of article five of the code duello, as outlined by Governor John Lyde Wilson of South Carolina: to wit, 'The party of the first part (meaning Zappo) must call upon the party of the second part (meaning myself) within a week of the supposed insult, or else assign cause for the delay, for the wrong cannot be considered aggravated if borne patiently for some time, and the while may have been used in preparation and practice.' Naturally, I stood there abashed at such a flagrant disregard of gentlemanly etiquette, and might be standing there yet, had not Willowhue, that boon companion and noble friend, directed my attention to the antecedent code adopted at the Clonmel assizes in the summer of 1777 at a convention called for that purpose for Counties Tipperary, Galway, Sigo, and Roscommon, and designed for the use of the entire Gaelic isle: to wit, 'The first offense requires the first apology, although the retort may have been more offensive than the insult; example: A tells B he is impertinent, and B retorts that he lies; yet A (supposing, of course, for the sake of the argument, that A be Zappo, and the matter at dispute a question of lays, not lies) must make the first apology, because he gave the first offense and then B (supposing, of course, that B be I) may explain away the retort by subsequent apology. But if a doubt exists who gave the first offense, the decision rests with the seconds; if they won't decide or can't agree, the matter must proceed to two shots or a hit, if the challenger requires it.'

'I simply declare you to be my second, by which case you deliver my grievance to Mr. Zappo, and then I, in accordance with the code duello, gun Mr. Zappo down.'

'Precisely,' returned Willowhue. 'Except in the case of Mr. Zappo's refusing to accept my note, in which case the matter devolves about me and second, and it will be my unfortunate responsibility' —here Willowhue turned to an uncomprehending Zappo—' to gun you down, Sir.'

All being decided upon, then, we agreed to meet this coming Saint Lucy's Day at The Oaks. The choice of weapons was pistols, to be used to the death.

(Telegram sent to Miss Clarissa Cloverfield from Lydia Lavern. It is dated Monday May, 19--, the day just prior to the duel which will be at dawn on the next morning.)

Clarissa,

Charles A. Lovelace is priceless! Got the lowdown on him. Heir to the Lovelace Oil Refinery fortunes. He is rich, honey, rich! \$100,000,000.00! Keep him away from Pete Zappo; lock him up; hide him. He is the break you have been waiting for, a free meal ticket.

Lydia Lavern

(Dispatch delivered to the home of Charles A. Lovelace.)

May 22, 19--

Dear Charles,

I know we have had our spats in the past, but I think it's about time we let bygones be bygones, don't you sweetie? It has been all my fault we've fussed, and I want to make it up to you so much. A person of your qualities is so rare these days. I respect you so much for your character. I just couldn't live with myself if I let you go and fight that slob, Zappo. You're too good for fighting with riff-raff like he is. And what if you should get killed? That would leave little ole me all by





my lonesome. You don't want that, do you?

Think of us, dearest. Think of all the good times ahead of us. It's just the two of us. We'll be so happy, and we can go away together. Don't fight Zappo and come to get me, or I will just worry myself to death about you.

Love forever,

Clarissa

(A hand dispatch sent to Clarissa Cloverfield Monday evening)

May 21, 19--

Dearest Clarissa,

I hope you find solace in the admiration, nay idolatry, of a man who will not tolerate sordid imputations made upon the character of a good and true woman. I am just such a man, as you know well.

My hurt from the altercation of Friday eve last is a wound the healing which will come only with the passing of time and the taste of blood. The blood I must taste is that of the foul Mr. Peter Zappo, a rapscallion of the most deplorable sort. I jest not when I tell you that the ball from my pistol shall find his heart, and, in so doing, it shall find my revenge.

On the morrow at dawn I shall exact this pleasant vengeance. After my business is done, I shall come for you and together we shall sojourn in the country. With fondest affection, I remain

Your servant,

Charles Algernon Lovelace

(Excerpt, from the unpublished journal of Charles Algernon Lovelace, Junior, 'Il Pensero in L' Allegro World':

Tonight I prepared for the duel. I took down Grandfather's old pistols and checked the sights. I placed in the charge and wadding, then introduced the ball into the muzzle and rammed the whole affair home. Afterwards, I checked the flint and put a new spring on the

locks. Then, all that remained for me to do was clear the flash hole, prime the powder pan, and replace the rod. While I was removing the pistols from Grandfather's trunk, I happened to notice the old family sword, carried by Tobias Swinburne Lovelace at the Second Battle of Lovelace Landing in 1864. I read the motto of the Lovelace men, which Grandfather had inscribed upon the blade for Tobias Swinburne's eighty-ninth birthday; *Draw me not in anger, Sheath me not in dishonor.* On a sudden stroke of Romantic whimsy, to which I am occasionally subject, I buckled on Tobias Lovelace's sword. As I examined myself in the mirror, I recited again the words which I had last said to my Clarissa, when she pleaded with me to forego the fight: 'I could not love thee, dear, so much,/Loved I not honor more.'

After I had undressed, I read a while in bed from the *Don Juan* of Lord Byron. Placing a letter which had arrived that morning into the volume for a bookmark, I turned out the light for sleep.

From, COURT RECORD, STATE OF LOUISIANA v PETER D. ZAPPO, IN THE CHARGE OF MURDER IN THE FIRST DEGREE.

PROSECUTION: Now, then, Mr. Willowhue, would you please describe to the court the events which transpired upon all the aforementioned's arriving at The Oaks.

WILLOWHUE: Certainly. I informed Mr. Lovelace and Mr. Zappo upon the necessity of pacing off ten steps before firing, allowed each to examine the pistols, and marked off ten paces in either direction from a neutral site perpendicular to a large oak tree.

PROSECUTION: And then what happened?

WILLOWHUE: Mr. Zappo and Mr. Lovelace proceeded each to step off ten spaces, upon which Mr. Zappo stumbled, dropping his pistol, which then discharged.

PROSECUTION: And what did you do?

WILLOWHUE: Acting in my capacity of mutual second, I advanced to retrieve Mr. Zappo's pistol, which I noticed was lying nearby on the ground.

PROSECUTION: And then what did you do?

WILLOWHUE: I stopped.

PROSECUTION: Why

WILLOWHUE: I noticed Mr. Lovelace was also lying on the ground.

From, COURT RECORD, STATE OF LOUISIANA v. PETER D. ZAPPO, IN THE CHARGE OF MURDER IN THE FIRST DEGREE. Counsel for prosecution having rested its case, counsel for defense was then ordered to proceed. The first witness for the defense was called and sworn.

DEFENSE: Now, then sir, you have just stated your name as Mr. Leon Underwood and your occupation as a physician. Now, Dr. Underwood, will you please state to the court your whereabouts the morning of May Twenty-second?

UNDERWOOD: Sure. I was in my office at 1623 Delacroix Street.

PROSECUTION: Objection! Your Honor, it is a well-known fact about town that the office of Dr. Leon Underwood, or, as I am to understand he is called by his more intimate associates, "Underwood the Undertaker," is one and the same of the address of the La Casa Bar and Grill at 1623 Delacroix Street.

UNDERWOOD: [Giving a slight shrug] You be a general practitioner long enough, you get used to a little of everything.

JUDGE VENABLE: Objection overruled. Proceed with the examination.

DEFENSE: Now, then, Dr. Underwood, as you have stated previously to the police, you left your, uh, office upon hearing a near-by shot and discovered the participants of the duel.

UNDERWOOD: That's correct.

DEFENSE: And did not the sight of one young man lying upon the ground, ashen-faced and bleeding, while another young man stood near-by holding a smoking pistol, cause you any wonder?

UNDERWOOD: Like I say, you be a general practitioner long enough, you get used to a little of everything.

DEFENSE: And would you describe for the

court, please, the last words of Mr. Lovelace?

UNDERWOOD: 'Ah, Willowhue, he has robbed me of my youth! Why, two moments ago, not all of Canal Street could have contained my over-reaching ambition, but now, but now--'

[A general hush settled over the courtroom. At the back of the spectators's benches, a woman was heard to weep softly.]

DEFENSE: And what, sir, was your impression at the time?

UNDERWOOD: That he was misquoting Shakespeare.

[A general titter. At the back of the courtroom, a woman was heard to exclaim, "Well, I never!"]

DEFENSE: Yes, well, uh, would you describe for the court, please, Dr. Underwood, the condition of Mr. Lovelace upon your examining him?

UNDERWOOD: Certainly. Ebullient.

DEFENSE: I beg your pardon?

UNDERWOOD: Ebullient.

[A general buzz of excitement was heard over the courtroom.]

DEFENSE: Now, there seems to be some confusion here, Dr. Underwood. Would you please describe for the court, sir, the course of the bullet that slew Mr. Lovelace?

UNDERWOOD: Sure. The ball, after leaving the barrel of the gun belonging to that fellow you call Zappo, went about ten feet before striking a buckle on the sword-belt that this Lovelace was wearing. The ball was deflected downward at about a forty-five degree angle, producing a slight flesh wound along the inside of Mr. Lovelace's thigh, before coming to rest inside Mr. Lovelace's left pocket by embedding itself into a College Penguin Edition of *Don Juan*.

PROSECUTION and DEFENSE: You mean Lovelace is *not* dead?

UNDERWOOD: Of course not. But because of the compromising position of his wound, as Lovelace called it, he insisted on going into seclusion immediately.

DEFENSE: You mean to say you could find this Lovelace again?

UNDERWOOD: Sure. There he is, on the second row.

[Mr. Lovelace hereupon rose in the court-

room with an embarrassed smile on his face and a large bandage wrapped about his inner thigh. Consternation reigned in the court.]

PROSECUTION: Objection! Objection, Your Honor! The state of Louisiana has charged Mr. Peter Zappo with murder in the first degree, and, by God, as murder in the first degree it stands! The mere fact that defense has produced a warm body does not alter the charge, for the defendant, by placing the wound where he did, has, for all practical purposes and principles, removed precisely that which manhood confers! *Ipsa factio and a priori*, Goddamit, 'tis what makes a man a man!

JUDGE VENABLE: A matter most easily decided in the men's room. Which pressing urgency reminds me, I might add, of a certain matter which has been uppermost in my attention for the past few moments now. Court is adjourned for the next ten minutes. Second door to your right as you go out, gentlemen. You can't miss it.

[Court was convened after a recess of ten minutes. Judge Venable reclaimed his place upon the bench and then called upon counsel for the prosecution to deliver the findings of the court.]

PROSECUTION: Your Honor . . . I do not think Miss Cloverfield will be inconvenienced.

[Consternation then reigned again in the courtroom as Miss Cloverfield embraced Mr. Lovelace, Miss Lydia H. "Bubbles" Lavern embraced Mr. Willowhue, and a young lady later identified in the press releases as Miss Bertha Crabbs embraced Mr. Zappo. After hammering for order for several minutes, Judge Venable succeeded in gaining the attention of most of the court.]

JUDGE VENABLE: It being the opinion of this court that all principals of this affair having demonstrated themselves beyond the shadow of a slightest doubt to be obviously mentally incompetant, all charges are herewith dropped. Court, thank God, is dismissed.

May 30, 19--

Dear Lydia,

I guess you have been reading the *Times-*

Picayune about the trial. The duel was the first one in Louisiana since 1851. This whole mess is freaky, ain't it, babycakes?

But, like you always say, dough is dough. And, babycakes, you know what I've always said: "I could live with a gorilla if he had dough." Charlesy baby is not much better than a gorilla, but oh-la-la money he has got. I just can't wait to say "I do."

It's so marvy that Charles Algernon Lovelace wants to marry Clarissa Cloverfield. Double take: he wants to marry little ole me. The day the trial is over I am going to bring the preacher to the courtroom, so he can't change his mind.

Oh, babycakes, I just love Charles more and more everytime I think about his money.

Yours in the mink,

Clarissa Cloverfield Lovelace

P.S. You'd better get used to this new signature. That's how I'll be signing my thousand dollar checks.

June 12, 19--

Dear Lydia,

Congrats, babycakes, on your recent marriage to Mr. Willowhue. It looks like you and I are having a hot streak lately. Who would have thought that both of us would have gotten on the gravy train like this? It just goes to prove that we have class, babycakes.

Poor old Pete really took a low blow on this deal. He just came to pick up some books, and he gets involved in the whole mess. What does he get? Miss Bertha Crabbs. I don't know if you saw her at the trial, but she is the lady wrestler type. No class whatsoever. I'll never understand what possessed Pete to tie the knot with her. She is going to drive him insane one way or another.

Charlesy baby and I have been here at Capri for about three days. It sure ain't what it is cracked up to be. I'm bored stiff and stiff as a board. You know why? Charlesy baby has insisted that we walk everywhere on this island. And, babycakes, you haven't seen anything

until you see how high the mountain is here. Every morning we've been here we've walked all the way to the top—all eight hundred stairs of the Pheonician staircase. Most people with any sense just take a bus. But not moneybags Charles.

Also the food around here is lousy. A hundred million dollars and you can't even get some eggs, bacon and toast. Nobody here acts like he has even heard of them. And water here is in bottles, and you have to pay for it. Have you ever heard of such? It tastes terrible, too! I'll never understand what people see in Europe. It's worse than living in the country

on a farm.

Oh, babycakes, get this: I finally got Charlesy baby off of this Byron kick and thought I had him cured. But this morning he decided that this Shelley had more romance than Byron. He said that he wanted to inspire himself about Shelley. So he gets himself a little rowboat, and this afternoon he has been rowing out in the ocean.

Babycakes, I guess it's about time to sign off now. See you back in New Orleans next week where life is normal.

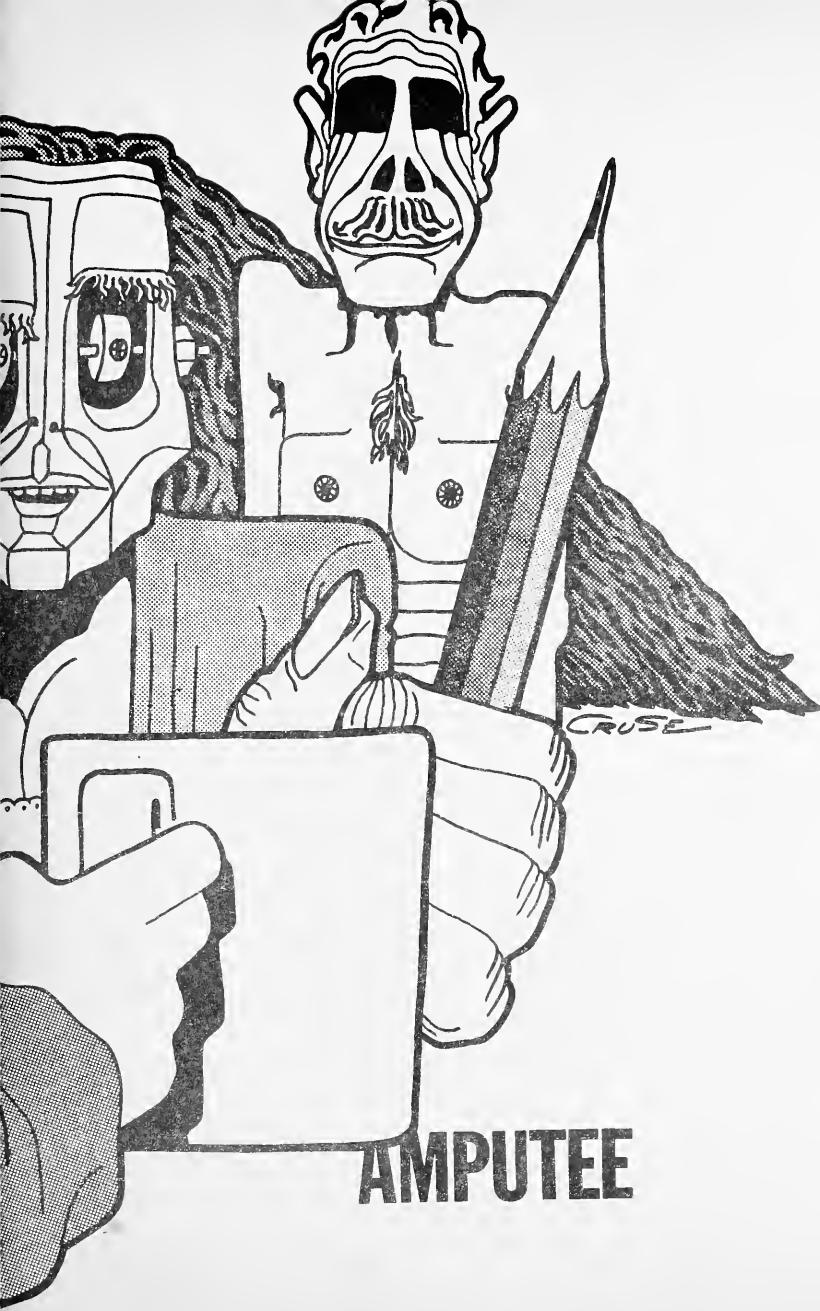
Clarissa

. . . and so, Mrs. Lovelace, may these papers and my personal consolation act in every way to assuage the grief which you now feel after this slur upon your son and your family name. If I have been of any aid whatsoever, I remain

Your Most Grateful Servent,

William Fitzpatrick Willowhue





AMPUTEE

FUGUE* on the PLATFORM COMMITTEE

manifest in rows of print

logic in gutenbergian order

(kid seethed in mother's milk)

once-thought zink & ink print

black type with & white border

(in neonate confusion, spilth)

? rapp on logical nullity

and deceive me non-rhythmicly

(chickenegg/eggchicken)

with vacillation between cause&effect

, irrational crux of neural enigma,

(chicken omelette overdone)

and sublime rhyme to reason;

summer candor / winter treason

(robespierre in drag)

father son & holy reason

love & war & peace in season

(mother's apple flag)

love thy neighbor

never waver

(chickenegg in a \$ideshow booth)

mothergoofs on little catshoofs &

maskedman stranger alone ranger

peace&freedom wanta eatum

dinner bell &

go to hell

(ding-dong)

deck the halls with boughs of holly

folly folly Folly

lord god agape

early in our mourning our song shall rise to thee
(cosmological gutenberg)

buy jumbo cheeseburger sandwiches . . .

(dong)

come frugal bird

and be my love

I'll foot the bill

I'll buy the \$ell

I'll treat you right

just hang on tight

come ride my fug-U machine

(ride it up)

up the big rock-candy mountain

to the great \$ociety

where the boxcars all are empty

There is a crystal fountain

flows from immanuel's veins

(it's red)

to wash you white as snow

(in a winter wonderland)

you're free to go

Come ride with me

Oh NO, Oh NO . . .

(gong-gong)

neonate rows of print

confusion in gutenbergian order

(manifest logic)

zinc to ink rhythm

and milk-white border

(logical crux enigmatically neural)

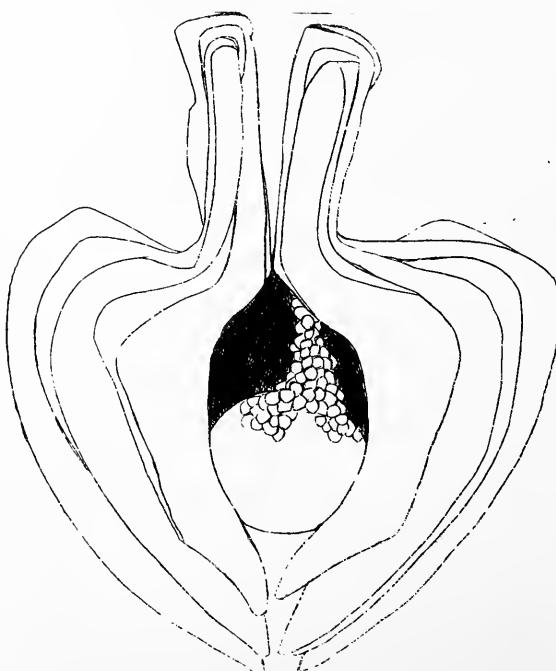
kidrhyme & mothereason
chicken omelette highly seasoned
mary had a little lamb

in every pot, and

relief is just a swallow away
then LET THEM EAT CAKE.

—Alan McWhorter

*
fugue — In psychiatry, a state of psychological amnesia during which a patient seems to behave in a conscious and rational way, although upon return to normal consciousness he cannot remember the period of time nor what he did during it; a temporary flight from reality.





LOCUS: A MEMOIR

Rain pools slicked the nighttime asphalt.
The street was too tacit, but for the histling feud
of car wheels passing by.
The line of a lamppost struck the brim around its head;
the air was thickly dewed.
She spoke of others while we walked,
other walks, other trees.
One day she would take me where the
bushes bent heavy with luscious blossoms,
where we would make bundled wreaths for our hair
(we smiled).
We sighed and walked.
In step we dwindled down the walk,
deluged by the air.

— *David Wilborn*

The Precarious Truth of THE SCARLET LETTER

by David Wilborn

When Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, he wrote a precariously contrived novel. The book is so extremely deceptive by nature that its susceptibility to whim or personal fancy is at once tragic and victorious. We have become so trained in what we *should* normally find in Hawthorne that we find specifically those things in *The Scarlet Letter* without taking a second look. The pat meanings which have been so simply and mechanically applied to the story are its tragedy. The surprising subtlety which avoids Hawthorne's usual moralizing is its victory. That the work does lie so precariously in the arms of the reader is its truth.

New England was a fanatical area in the colonial period. Religion was a stern taskmaster, and suspicion of the uncontrolled was a relentless prowler. Perhaps the uncertainty of venturing into a land that was certainly unknown, untaught, and unrestricted caused the people to seek some sort of security — the security of being in control. The systems which they devised, the institutions which they trusted, the public figures which they deified — these were the premises of the Puritan people. An encounter with anything beyond the confined elements was an opportunity for the gullible colonial mind to expand the unknown into the unrecognizable. So it is not to New England that Hawthorne has actually brought us. His setting is the haunted world of ignorance, suspicion, restriction, and stern conformity which man has made universal.

Hawthorne's world is infested with symbols. The characters which he creates, the homes in which they live, the woods in which they stroll, all function symbolically in the context of the novel. In the characters especially, however, Hawthorne expands the embodiment of an idea into a distinct and colorful personality. Hester Prynne confined to being a cardboard cutout of the suffering sinner would be dull and insignificant. But by being remorseful at times, sometimes even close to spiteful, and then completely frightening in moral strength, Hester

Prynne takes on a very human, heroic clarity, especially when compared to the staunch imprisoned personalities of the Puritan public. Roger Chillingworth seems to be a sensitive, understanding individual early in his interview with Hester at the jail, but before he leaves the scene, his patronizing is obviously deplorable. Finally Hawthorne thrusts at us the malicious attitudes of the man in one of the most realistic characterizations in the novel: the man whose attempts at revenge have manifested themselves in a cold withdrawal from sensitivity and sympathy. The unconfessing Arthur Dimmesdale acquires qualities of strength during the course of the novel, moving from a figure of timorous hypocrisy to a character of naive determination. Finally Pearl, the ungraspable, perhaps the most purely symbolic of the characters, manages to distract our attention away from her symbolic function by her unpredictable, childlike antics of mischief and innocent sore-picking. By shaping symbols into personalities, Hawthorne heightens the distinction between the stiff setting of restriction and the general freedom of character which the figures have, and perhaps gives an invaluable clue to the interpretation of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Symbolism generally leads to standard answers. As was mentioned earlier, *The Scarlet Letter* is certainly a book of symbolism. Perhaps that is why we have grown tired of hearing that the scarlet letter stands for guilt or that Pearl is the manifestation of social persecution. Perhaps the questioning of the presence of the letter on Dimmesdale's breast has grown too stale from being asked too many times.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was grasping for something beyond a one-to-one ratio of meaning in writing his greatest work. The multiplicity of meanings in the symbols may, after all, not only lead us to the novel's theme — it may be the novel's theme.

Hester Prynne, detested by the community, ousted from her social position, suddenly becomes one of the most respected of all citizens. She who had cursed the respectability of

the people finds herself the epitome of respectability. The letter which was the sign of her guilt was highly ornate and attractive. Did the letter stand for *adulteress*, *angel*, or *able*? Hester Prynne bore her badge with pride.

It is not only in the character of Hester Prynne that we find that Hawthorne has invested almost everything with a multiple symbolism. Roger Chillingworth is at once the doctor, the soother of ills, and the revenger. Arthur Dimmesdale is at once the holiest of ministers and the lowest of hypocrites. Pearl is simultaneously the most provoking of reminders and evil of inquisitors, and the most innocent and unrestricted of spirits. Hawthorne apparently was saying something about duality of meaning in *The Scarlet Letter*, and it is when we try to assign to each symbol a singular significance that we fracture the unity of the work. Life is composed of ambiguities, and it is when we try to assign to each thing a "good" or "evil" significance that we fracture the unity of the work.

With such an idea in mind, consideration of the previously discussed setting becomes quite valuable. It is the tendency of the suspicious to discredit anything which does not have an assigned value. If it is not to be either "good" or "bad," then it is not to be known. Restriction to convention, then, is restriction to a stale uniformity, a uniformity which Hawthorne obviously detested. When finally Hester admirably decides to reveal Chillingworth's identity to Dimmesdale, it is because she was not "accustomed, in her long seclusion from society, to measure her ideas of right and wrong by standard external to herself."¹ Hawthorne also says of Hester Prynne in a glorious tone, "The world's law was no law for her mind."¹⁵⁸ With quite the opposite tone, Hawthorne describes Dimmesdale as a man to whom "it would always be essential to his peace to feel the pressure of a faith about him, supporting, while it confined him within its iron framework."¹¹⁷ Hawthorne is quite severely jabbing convention and conformity. Throughout the novel, he makes uncountable references to the superiority of the unrestrained to the restricted. "It was the exhilarating effect . . . of breathing the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized,

lawless region."¹⁹⁵

Regardless of the number of pointed statements integrated into the novel, however, there can be no more powerful remark than the creation of Pearl. "In giving her existence, a great law had been broken," Hawthorne says, and then adorns her with a wildness which was kindred to all wild things.⁶⁶ Ruled by impulses, untainted by convention, Pearl is the personification of the freedom from ignorance, suspicion, restriction, and stern conformity, which Hawthorne so admired and chose as the theme of *The Scarlet Letter*.

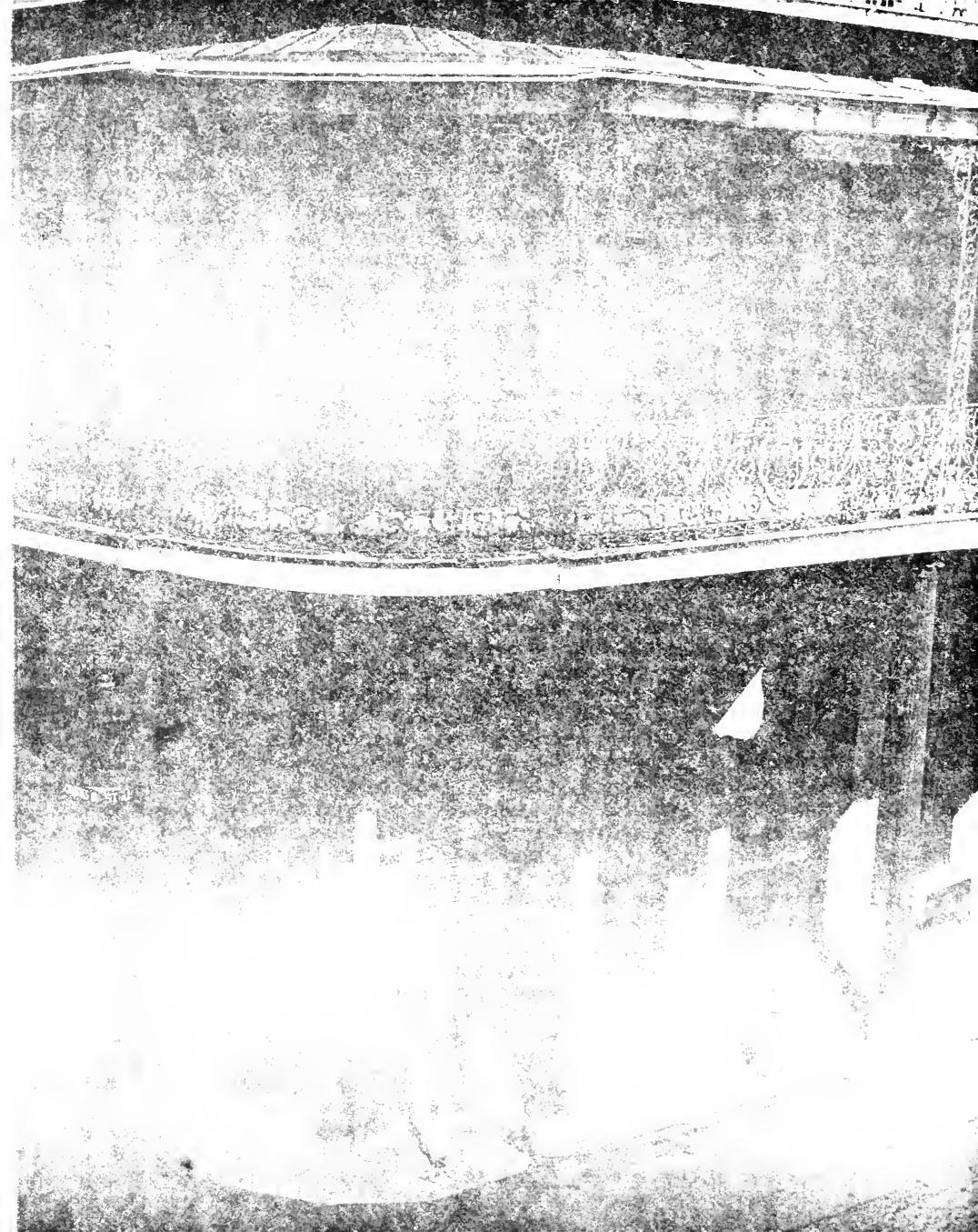
Saying that *The Scarlet Letter* is an attack on Puritanism is a frightfully restrictive statement. Saying that it is an advocacy of Transcendental independence is equally confining. Except in the most limited of terms, *The Scarlet Letter* cannot be described as merely a comment on the social problems which were its contemporaries. Hawthorne wrote his novel with a much larger scope in mind, and the Puritanism and Transcendentalism were only representatives of more universal, timeless subjects. In an age of social enforcements, religious pressures, and lack of individuality, Hawthorne was saying that truth cannot be perceived when fear, suspicion, and allegiance to simple conformity require men to think in terms of "good" and "bad" or "right" and "wrong." Truth can be perceived only when restriction has been discarded and the ambiguity of life and its elements has been realized. It is the relationship of such a theme to the environment of the day that constitutes the actual historical relevance of the novel.

Easily derived meanings have no place in a discussion of *The Scarlet Letter*. The ambiguity of the novel is its most valuable characteristic, and it is only when the reader becomes aware of Hawthorne's delicate treatment of inscrutability of character and symbolism as exposed against a harnessed setting that he appreciates what Hawthorne has produced. *The Scarlet Letter* must lie precariously in the arms of the reader if it is to continue its exposition of truth.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, THE SCARLET LETTER, (N.Y., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965) p. 153. All page references are to this edition.





A BALLOON FOR MANNY

by David Robertson

Quite recently, and without any particular concern, the world for Michael contracted into a two-dimensional rectangle, measuring three and a half feet on one side, by four and three-quarters of an inch on the other. This sudden distortion of his sphere had impressed Michael as neither very unusual nor very important. He had, after all, known things more absurd to occur in life; and life in general had become for Michael as sterile and as self-centered as a toe-nail clipping. There had been the usual warning symptoms that foretold a change in environment: the long, empty nights when he had tossed in bed and listened for hours to his own heart pound; the weepy visits from relatives that had wrung him of compassion; and finally, there were the pills, death's tiny pals, brightly-colored little distillations of death that had borne him high and laid him, sweetly-smiling and oblivious, down to the hospital.

Michael stood by his bed near the window, letting the weak sunlight run over the room. There was little view; the double-strength pane gazed over a graveled driveway for fifteen feet before meeting its twin in a warehouse next door. At one end the alley below opened into an avenue, and if Michael pulled back the curtain and pressed his eye tightly against the glass, sometimes, if he felt like straining himself and the day wasn't overcast, he could see a patch of blue. The other end of the alley was blind.

"On Sundays, you can see the balloon-man."

Michael started, outraged at this invasion. He whirled irritably about, and, as his eyes adjusted to the shadows at the back of the room, he slowly made out . . . a girl. At least Michael thought she was. She was certainly the strangest girl he had ever seen. She was barely a slip of light in the darkness, and couldn't

have been taller than five feet. Her face was almost unbearably fragile, and at her temples Michael could clearly make out the blue translucence of her veins. Down one side of her forehead, and carelessly pressed against one ear, there was a sheaf of light, reddish-blond hair, tousled and short like a child's. Except for her eyes, Michael could have sworn that she was a pixie, tripped in on the shadows from some young man's imagination. Her eyes, however, were of a palest blue, and reminded Michael of nothing so much as of a summer sky after a heavy, violent storm. They were of a blueness past tears, and when she spoke it was with the detachment of a little girl reciting a lesson:

"He comes each Sunday, you know, and stands on the corner to sell his balloons. When nobody was staying here, I used to come and sit by the window and wait for him. He has all kinds of balloons, dozens and dozens of them, all filled up with helium so they'll go 'way up in the air. Parents who've come to visit will stop and buy some to give to their children in the hospital. One Sunday they let me go for a walk, and I saved up my money for weeks and weeks and when I got out the first thing I did was buy five dollars' worth of balloons. I stood on the corner and let them go, one by one. I watched one of them as it went all the way up. It went higher and higher, and the higher it got the happier it was, and it puffed itself out so much and keep spreading itself so thin, until finally, it burst."

She stopped to catch her breath, and lit a cigarette. In the fire's ugly flare Michael saw that her hands were trembling. She noticed his study of her fingers and blew out the match.

"Oh, God," she exclaimed, "people make me so nervous."

Then she was gone.

Michael stood alone in the darkness, feeling startled and a little sick. He pressed his hands to his temples and, slowly, sat down on the bed. The room was beginning to spin, and before reality became a kaleidoscope, Michael tried desperately to catch some of the pieces. The bed. The radio. The window. They were all quite real. Except for the door, double-steel and never locked, Michael could have been sitting in a bedroom almost anywhere. But the girl ...

Michael got up and walked to the spot where she had stood. In the afternoon's dying light, he saw something on the floor and reached down to pick it up. It was a small match, burned to a crisp at both ends. Michael stood for several hours that night holding the match in his hand.

The next day, the patients were taken to a circus. Michael's doctors had considered a circus a good introduction to reality, but finally had decided against it. Michael had been standing by the window when he heard the patients return.

There was the usual clamor and quarreling of neurotic people to be heard almost anywhere. From his door, Michael saw Miss Poins, the head nurse, give out an exasperated sigh and head down the hall to line up the patients. The girl of the night before led the line.

She walked, her breasts pouted out and her head pertly back, looking neither left nor right. Dangling from her right hand, and held as delicately as a debutant would a rose, there was a large, brightly-colored balloon, of the kind sold to children at the midway. As she passed by Michael she gave a broad, knowing wink, and deliberately released the balloon from her hand. They watched together as it slowly rose in the air, until it bumped up short against the hospital's ceiling.

It took an orderly forty-five minutes to get that damn balloon down, Miss Poins later complained.

They found it easier to talk that night. Her name was Manny. She was, as Michael had guessed, only a year older than he; but she had lived far longer in experience. Manny had been a spindly, tobacco-chewing outcast at a small provincial school for Southern young ladies.

No one had noticed for two days when she ran away to New York with a young journalist.

"Christ, I was alive then," Manny told him. "Bobby—I loved to call his name, it was just like blowing a bubble—Bobby got a job with the Greenwich Voice, and we had an apartment on the east side of the Village. Drugs were first beginning to catch on there, but I never turned on. There were too many things to do, and taste, and smell, and feel. Neither one of us had any money—I guess you could say we were sort of happily starving to death together—and I had to wear a lot of Bobby's clothes around the apartment. There was one of his shirts—an old work-shirt, it smelled so nice and was so rough—it was almost like a good-morning kiss from Bobby before he'd shaved. And on Sundays Bobby used to get up and get dressed and go down to a delicatessen around the block. He'd buy two beers and a newspaper and bring them back to the apartment. And we'd sit in bed all morning and read the *New York Times* and have brown beer for breakfast!"

She looked away in the distance, and Michael noticed again how blue her eyes were.

"We were there for two months before the police came," she said.

"Oh, it was all right," she went on, nervously lighting a cigarette. "My parents were very nice about it, and always made sure there was somebody in the house to stay with me. But—oh, Christ!—have you ever had to live in just one room and feel your life just sort of slowly rotting away?"

Michael said he knew what she meant.

"I came here after that," she added.

Manny looked away again, and seemed to be concentrating upon the sterile plain of a plastic coffee table in front of them.

"Maybe they'll let you take a walk," she said, and quickly brightened.

"Just around the corner there's a bakery, and the first thing that comes to you when you get out is the smell of old bread. A sort of warm, manly odor of old bread. That's Harold. The bread smell makes me think of a man I call Harold. Harold would be a writer for the *Times*, and is very solemn and important. He'd always wear a weskit, and if I had an apartment Harold would come and eat pounds and pounds

of my bread and never, never smile. Oh, and next to the bakery there's a tobacco-shop, and next to the tobacconist there's a shoe-shine place, and the tobacco and the shoe-polish mix together in the air and make me think of Spenser. Spenser is an instructor in English literature. He's very tall and thin, and always wears tweeds and always smokes a pipe, and always has his shoes polished. Spenser is very, very, tweedy, and very, very, literary."

She smiled at Michael, and for the first time he noticed her teeth. They weren't very straight, each had grown up according to its own whimsy, but each was very white, and each was perfectly pure.

"Now tell me about yourself," she said, and looked straight at Michael. They talked together until five that morning.

II.

Solid, stolid, ponderous, Dr. A. P. Strickner made his way down the hall, methodically digesting his breakfast. He looked down at his watch. Eight-thirty. What a time for rounds. Down along the hall, in the wan morning sunlight, some of the patients made their way back from breakfast, looking in their loose-floating robes like some frail, lunar creatures. He hoped he could finish with the loonies early today, Dr. Strickner thought. He came to the last room on his rounds.

"Hello, Michael," he said.

To his surprise, the patient sat up and greeted him eagerly. Great God, Dr. Strickner thought, the dead shall rise again. The patient and he were talking amiably when Dr. Petite burst into the room.

"Mi-i-chael," Dr. Petite exclaimed, "how ya doing fella?" Dr. Petite had thrust his head through the open doorway, and his popinjay cry had shattered the morning.

"Hey, hey, studbuddy," he cautioned as he came across the room, "I hear you found a little friend on the hall, eh fella?"

Dr. Petite nudged Michael in the ribs and flashed his winning smile. His last year at the University, Dr. Petite had won esteem from his peer group by regularly spending week-ends with a young co-ed. His last semester, before

Dr. Petite had entered medical school and told the girl it was all over, she had once remarked that Dr. Petite had a winning smile. Dr. Petite's love had long since faded to a photograph in his hip pocket, but he had never forgotten the girl's observation, and he tried to smile as often as possible. Dr. Petite believed that if you only smiled often enough, everything would turn out all right.

Dr. Petite and Michael chatted agreeably as Dr. Strickner took notes. *Patient much better today. In greater contact with reality. Dependence upon drugs appears lessened. Ability to relate much improved.* He snapped shut the notebook.

"Time's up," he announced.

Dr. Strickner walked out of the room ahead of Dr. Petite. He glanced down at his watch. Nine o'clock. Good. Not another round 'til ten. He could go to his office and read without interruption for an hour. He would go to his office and read. Alone.

In the weeks that followed, as the long winter nights slowly lapsed into spring, Michael came to see more and more of Manny. They began to take their meals together; they went for long walks around the hospital together; and always they talked, talked deep into the night until a tingling along their calves and the clamor of orderlies preparing breakfast told them it was daybreak. Manny was allowed visiting privileges, and on her return she would smuggle books for Michael back into the hospital under her blouse. She brought him Keats, Shelly, Lamb, and once, on an impulse, a little Lord Byron. Michael had gone to bed one night after talking with Manny until two, when he was shaken awake by the rough hand of the orderly.

"She wants you," he said.

Michael, still a little sleepy, sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes.

"Who?" he asked.

The orderly looked down on him and smiled thinly.

"You know who," he said.

Manny led him by the hand into her room.

"Oh, look," she exclaimed, "just look."

She pointed to her window, which, unlike Michael's, was very large and gave on an expanse of sky. Outside in the darkness a flurry

of snowflakes danced in white ecstasy and flung themselves spread-eagle against the pane. Manny fluttered excitedly against the window.

"January, February, March," she intoned. "The last snowfall of winter. The winter turned too cold and is dying, just like poor old Dr. Strickner."

A single snowflake, intricately delicate, pressed itself against the window and was caught for a moment before being consumed by the pane. Manny lightly pressed her lips against the glass.

"Good-by," she whispered. "I wish I could have known you more. Good-by, little snowflake."

She turned about, and Michael noticed that her hands were trembling. At the sight of him she flushed, and in her embarrassment began to talk rapidly:

"I just wanted to say good-by to the snow," she explained. "It was the last we'll see of it before the winter goes away. I wanted to go outside in it and have snowflakes on my lashes and light, wet kisses against my nose. Oh, Christ, I want to see the snow."

Michael stood for a moment, looking outside the window, and, suddenly, he also knew what he wanted. He wanted out.

III.

Michael stood outside the hospital, smoking a cigarette and waiting for his family. Except for an unbreakable habit of chain-smoking and a slight tendency for trembling hands, he had descended to that level of functional insanity commonly known as normal. It had all been amazingly easy. Michael had awakened that morning feeling no less insane than usual, and had gone to have breakfast with Manny. They were still sitting at the table when Dr. Petite had come to take Michael to a conference with Dr. Strickner. Half-way to the door, Dr. Petite had turned to give one last smile to Manny. He had become somewhat startled when she stuck out her tongue.

Dr. Strickner had been reading when Michael arrived, and appeared a little irritated. In the past few weeks, he had said, Michael had made an amazing recovery, and, in his opinion,

would not benefit from further hospitalization. Michael's parents would be there that afternoon. In the hospital's opinion, modern therapy had re-made Michael a valuable and useful member of society.

Michael had rushed back to the dayroom to tell the news to Manny, but had been unable to find her. An orderly there had told him that shortly after he had left, Dr. Petite, all smiles and charm, had returned to take Manny to shock-treatment. Something about confusing reality and illusion. Michael had gone back to his room and slowly begun to dress.

Now, outside the hospital, Michael breathed his first fresh air in almost two months. An orderly was weeding the hospital's flower bed, and off to Michael's right, from an intricately-twined bank, floated a lushly rank odor of wild honeysuckle. Michael moved closer to the man and breathed the sweet, wild-onion odor of his own sweat. An early spring breeze wafted its way along the block, and Michael recognized with a start the smell of the bakery. "*The warm, manly odor of old bread.*" Michael heard the laughter of children, and with a start he looked down the block and saw the balloon-man. Sunday. Michael had lost track of time in the hospital, and had almost forgotten that the day was holy. He looked back at the hospital, trying to pick out one particular window along a row of almost undistinguishable panes. The steel and plastic facade of the building gave no favors. Then, resolutely, Michael began to stride down the block. He stopped in front of the balloon-man's box, fishing in his pocket for change, all the money the hospital had allowed him.

"I'd like . . . I'd like a balloon, please," he said.

"Huh?" The man peered out inquisitively at Michael.

"The balloons are for kids, mister," he told him.

But Michael continued to wait defiantly in front of the man's box, and finally he handed over a balloon, to Michael's surprise a large, fat, blue one. Michael stood for a moment holding on to the cord as he gave a long, final gaze back to the hospital.

"Hey mister," he heard, "what you planning

to do with it?" and Michael realized with a start the absurdity, and perhaps danger, of his parents arriving to find him holding a large child's balloon in one hand.

"I'm going to let it go," Michael told him, and deliberately released his hold.

The man stared at Michael for a moment in blank amazement. Then he disgustingly shook his head.

"You got to be crazy," he muttered.

Up, up and away it went, rising above the city streets and trying to soar into the sky. An

unexpected breeze sprang up, and blew it in a light caress against the hospital windows. Michael wouldn't watch it go all the way up. He knew what would happen to it.

". . . and it went higher and higher, and the higher it got the happier it was, and it puffed itself out so much, and spread itself so thin, until finally, it burst."

It rose, higher and higher in the afternoon sky. Michael followed it until it was almost indistinguishable, a little touch of blue in a heaven of deeper blue.



THE WELDER INSTRUCTS HIS HELPER

First, these two pieces fit, so, in the vise.
If they will not, they must be bent until
They do. You see, we lose the price
Of both if we weld one that doesn't fill
The gap precisely. Second, for Christ's sake,
They must align exactly — there's no way
In which, once welded, we can ever break
These two apart. And third, allow no play
Or shift between the two . . . they should not move.
If the pair is braced correctly then it rings
As one, when struck upon the joining groove.
In short, take care — there are two kinds of things
That should be right before the flash is done
And unity achieved; cold steel is one.

—Reid Byers

“THERE'S NOTHING AS SOMETHING AS ONE”

e.e. cummings

i've heard that one and one are two
i've heard that they are three
cummings says they're only one
and that means i is we

from what i've seen of life i'd say
that one and one are two.
yes, even if it sometimes seems
that i and we are you

and you are i and both are one
and happy, evermore,
when, pseudo — semanticallogically,
we wind up on the floor.

—Reid Byers

PRELIMINARY REPORT

The problem first arose when 38,
(A scheduled Delta flight) New York to Surtey,
Sighting an Angel standing on a great
White cloud (a strato-cumulus) at 30
Thousand feet, reported it, a wheeze
To ground control, they noted that it stood
At least 6 feet, with gold wings (12 degrees)
And further noted their decision would
Require a check of nationality.
The photographs could not identify
Exactly. This eventuality
Was well provided for (Procedure Y).
The orders quickly came (Condition Brown).
A Skybolt rocket (Class 4) brought it down.

—Reid Byers

SIXAIN

I will not rage against the drug that passes
 me an early sleeper,
Drape – white covered, on cold steel and plastic laid
Watching the mad white mask move and call
 to the scalpel's keeper,
And smooth skin parting in deference to the silent blade,
Though that which caused this wasting, stretching
 out and drawing thin,
Cannot be taken out, indeed, could not reside within.

—Reid Byers



Swinburne's "HERTHA"

by Wade Black

Appreciating Swinburne is largely a problem of understanding his idea of the function of the artist and the definition of art. In both of these ideas he is quite opposed to most of the Victorian critics, for he follows largely the ideas of Hugo and "art for art's sake." While the general trend of the Victorians in all literature is Platonic, dominated by the necessity for truths and moral issues in artistic apologetics, Swinburne is one of the few Aristotelian critics. As he himself said, "A poet's business is presumably to write good verses, and by no means to redeem the age and remold society."¹ In both his critical and poetic writings the major stress is on the perfect artistic creation, a combination of ideal sound, structure, and development, rather than on the subject. This is not to say, however, that he is uninterested in content, as can be seen in his review "Victor Hugo: *L'Annee terrible*" — only that content is subordinate to the pure artistry of verse.

His ideas on poetry can be easily seen in his essays such as "The Chaotic School," a hot-tempered attack on Browning. But it is also evidenced in his poetry, particularly "Hertha," an eloquent combination of content and lyric beauty. "Hertha" is one of Swinburne's later poems, written during the second half of his major literary career eight years before his collapse. In it he has slightly tempered his fiery youthful desire to shock in favor of a more purposeful statement of belief. Many critics take "Hertha" to be Swinburne's personal philosophy of life; W.M. Payne calls it a "genuine confession of faith."² This confession is one of extreme Naturalism, Hertha herself being the mother, the earth, the foundation of nature. She is the source of everything and is everything. As she says,

Out of me man and woman, wild beast and
bird; before God was, I am. (1.15)

and

God changes, and man, and the form of them
bodily; I am the soul. (1.5)

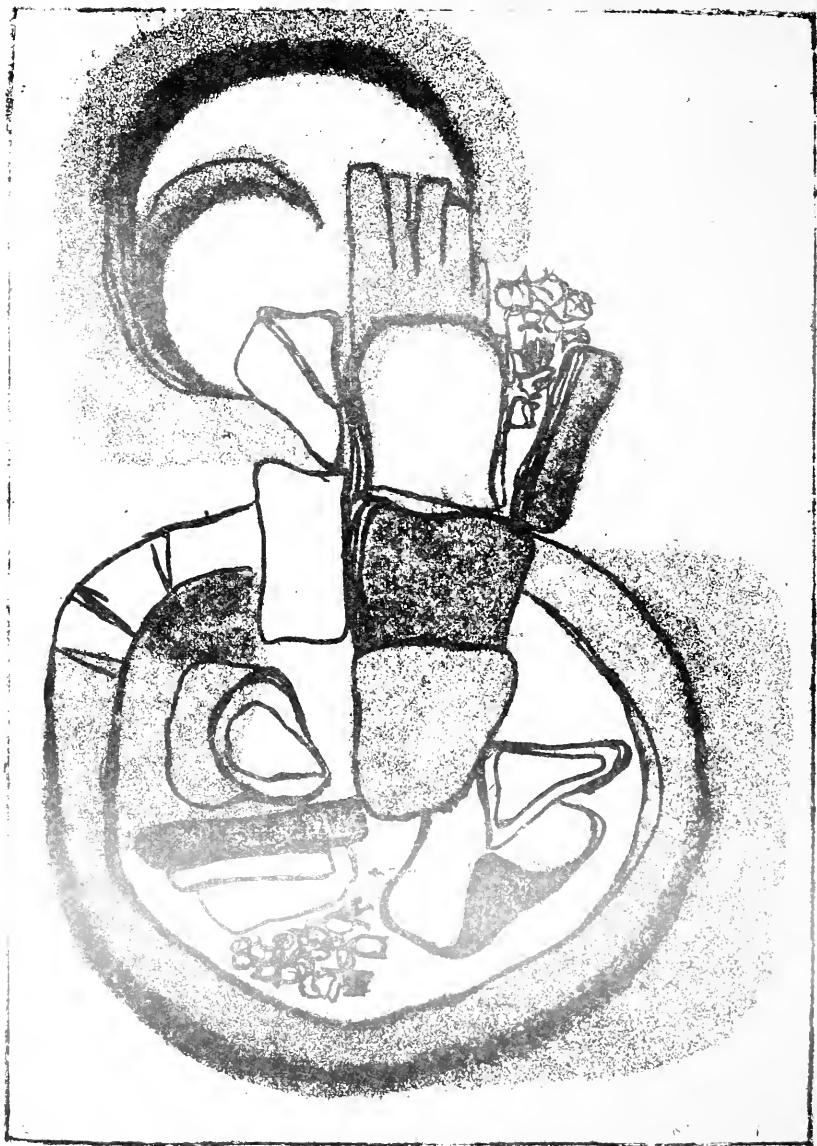
Furthering the Naturalism, in lines 31-35 Swinburne makes Hertha an identity with all her parts rather than the sum. She is each individual part, and yet she is all individual parts. But Hertha is more than the individual, nor can she be strictly identified with "Nature." She is the source of mankind, of nature, even of God; an underlying abstract that unifies all and is yet very real.

The poem can be divided into four major sections by content. The first, extending to line 40, is the above definition and discussion of Hertha herself. Following this and extending to line 95 is a section allying Hertha with the source of all knowledge. This is a break from both the Romantics who stressed intuition and the other Victorians who tended to be religious and were frightened by the scientific discoveries. Swinburne accepts the scientific advances; in fact, he alludes to Darwin in lines 11-14 and 41-45. Knowledge can only be derived from Hertha, from the source of all:

Who hath given, who hath sold it thee,
Knowledge of me?

Nor spirit nor flesh can make answer, but only
thy mother alone.

From line 66 to 90 Swinburne details the steadfastness and tolerance of Hertha as her children





turn from her to "the God of their fashion." She grants them the "free life of their living" while chiding them:

Ye would not know the sun overshining the
shadows and stars overpast. (1.90)

But in the last stanza of this section Swinburne sees and awaits the return to the mother and only true source, as Hertha says:

Set the shadow called God
In your skies to give light;
But the morning of manhood is risen and the
shadowless soul is in sight. (11.93-95)

The third section, containing lines 96-155, is a curious combination of the ideas of the three other parts. The central image is the tree Igdrasil, in German mythology the tree of life. Hertha and the life tree are identical — "The life tree am I." (1.99). Swinburne strengthens the idea of Hertha's permanence and imensity with several minor images, particularly that of Time in lines 116-120, as a bird slowly climbing through her branches apparently lost within her great size. Possibly the most important part of this section is lines 138-140,

My growth have no guerdon
But only to grow,
Yet I fail not of growing for lightnings above
me or deathworms below.

The first two lines illustrate the chance direction of her growth and expansion, again stressing the freedom motif found throughout the poem. It is only chance selection that determines the future, another Darwinian allusion. Freedom is granted that this growth be unrestricted, and Hertha's children are free to contribute to their own development. In the last lines Swinburne emphasizes that this growth will go on despite the "lightnings" of the nebulous and therefore frightening future and the "deathworms" of the religiosity and ignorance of the past. Growth is inevitable and a necessity to insure the freedom Hertha desires.

Section four, from lines 136 to the end of the poem, is the most powerful and most vivid illustration of Swinburne's thought. The thought is primarily an affirmation of man, while at the same time it frees man from any obligation to nature or to Hertha herself. The section begins with one of the strongest passages in the poem:

I bid you but be;
I have need not of prayer;
I have need of you free
As your mouths of my air;
That my heart may be greater within me,
beholding the fruits of me fair. (11.156-160)

Again we find the theme of freedom, as indeed the entire section is primarily an expansion of line 95. Next Swinburne deals most strongly with the decline of religious faith that is to be replaced by love as the guide for man's direction:

Behold now your God that ye made you,

For his twilight is come on him.

Thought made him and breaks him,
Time slays and forgives;
But to you, as Time takes him,
This new thing it gives,
Even love, the beloved Republic, that feeds
upon freedom and lives.

The poem then ends with the glorification of man:

Man, equal and one with me, man that is
made of me, man that is I. (1.200)

Swinburne himself rates "Hertha" as one of his greatest works, saying "I rate 'Hertha' highest as a single piece, finding in it the most of lyric force and music combined with the most condensed and clarified thought."³ A glance at any of the verses will illustrate its lyric beauty. For, as was stated before, Swinburne is not satisfied with mere presentation of an idea. He seeks always the ideal sound and lyric grace with which to express his idea, even to the extent that some critics attack him for stressing sound over meaning. But in "Hertha" this attack is not justified, as he does not lose clarity in sacrifice to sound or verse form. In fact, in "Hertha" the form contributes strongly to the clarity. Swinburne's choice of form is especially suited to place great stress on the last line of each stanza, which he frequently uses to make a strong point. The first four lines are of only two feet each, throwing considerable weight on the hexameter final line. To further this weight shift, the poet often breaks the anapestic rhythm by inserting an iamb in the fourth line; this creates a tension that is relieved by the smooth rhythm of the long last line. He frequently also uses a repetition of sounds and words to tie together the first four lines and a different set of sounds and words to set off the last line. The rime ababb ties the last line back into the rest of the stanza strongly.

We can thus see the strength of this poem in its unity and clarity as a statement of the author's thought. Sounds function to make it lyrical, structure ties it into a concise unity, and content is controlled and ably presented. As such "Hertha" is the ideal work of art that Swinburne sought, the ideal he describes in his essay on Hugo's *L'Année terrible*, the eloquent combination of content and lyric beauty.

FOOTNOTES

1 Walter E. Houghton and G. Robert Strange, VICTORIAN POETRY AND POETICS, p. 658.

2 Clyde Kenneth Hyder, SWINBURNE'S LITERARY CAREER AND FAME, p. 233.

3 Houghton, p. 651.

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